United Nations E/CN.3/2005/24

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
21 December 2004

Original: English

Statistical Commission
Thirty-sixth session
1-4 March 2005
Item 7 (g) of the provisional agenda*
Activities not classified by field: coordination and integration of statistical programmes

Report of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities on its third and fourth meetings

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the Statistical Commission the report of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities, chaired by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, on its third (New York, 1 March 2004) and fourth (New York, 1-3 September 2004) meetings. The report is transmitted to the Commission in accordance with a request of the Statistical Commission at its thirty-fifth session.[a] The report is presented for information. The Commission may wish to take into account in its discussion under relevant agenda items the views expressed by the Committee. A list of the relevant agenda items and paragraphs of the present report follows:

Agenda item	*Title*	*Relevant paragraph(s)*
5 (b)	Health statistics	7 (I), 16 (II)
7 (c)	Indicators for follow-up to United Nations conferences	5 (I), 7-10 (II)
7 (d)	Presentation of statistical data and metadata	14 (II)
7 (e)	Common open standards for the exchange and sharing of data and metadata	19 (II)
7 (f)	Information and communication technologies statistics	8 (I), 12 (II)

Note: I = report on the third meeting.
II = report on the fourth meeting.

* E/CN.3/2005/1.

[a] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2004, Supplement No. 4* (E/2004/24), chap. I.A.

04-66079 (E) 020205

Report of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities on its third and fourth meetings

Contents

		Paragraphs	Page
Part One			
Report of the third meeting of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities (New York, 1 March 2004)			4
I.	**Introduction**	1	4
II.	**Work of the meeting**	2–13	4
	A. **Adoption of the agenda**	2	4
	B. **Harmonization of the base year for index numbers**	3	4
	C. **Draft declaration of principles for statistical activities in international organizations**	4	4
	D. **Strategic issues related to Millennium Development Goal indicators**	5	4
	E. **Q2004 satellite conference on data quality**	6	5
	F. **World Health Organization Friends of the Chair report to the Statistical Commission and its implications for the Committee**	7	5
	G. **Other business**	8–12	5
	H. **Agenda, dates and venue for the fourth meeting of the Committee in September 2004**	13	6
Part Two			
Report of the fourth meeting of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities (New York, 1-3 September 2004)			8
I.	**Introduction**	1	8
II.	**Work of the meeting**	2–25	8
	A. **Adoption of the report of the third meeting and of the agenda of the fourth meeting**	2	8
	B. **Draft declaration of principles for statistical activities in international organizations**	3–4	8
	C. **Follow-up to the Q2004 satellite conference on data quality**	5–6	9
	D. **Strategic issues related to Millennium Development Goal indicators**	7–10	9
	E. **Statistics at the subnational level**	11	10
	F. **Information and communication technology indicators**	12	10
	G. **Tourism statistics**	13	11
	H. **Presentation of data and metadata**	14	11
	I. **Harmonization of the base year for index numbers**	15	11

J.	Health statistics	16	11
K.	Revision policies	17	12
L.	Household survey network	18	12
M.	Standards on data and metadata exchange	19	12
N.	Issues related to the work of the task forces and intersecretariat working groups	20	12
O.	Major new initiatives planned by organizations	21	13
P.	Other matters relating to the Statistical Commission	22	13
Q.	Other business	23–25	13

Part One

Report of the third meeting of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities (New York, 1 March 2004)

I. Introduction

1. The Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities held its third meeting in New York on 1 March 2004. The meeting was chaired by Andrew Flatt, Director of the Statistics Division of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).

II. Work of the meeting

A. Adoption of the agenda

2. The Committee adopted the agenda.

B. Harmonization of the base year for index numbers

3. Several members of the Committee provided oral updates on their current efforts to implement the Committee recommendation to rebase all index numbers using 2000 as base year and to complete the process by the end of 2005. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) volunteered to send out a questionnaire in June 2004 to request from all Committee members information on the status of the rebasing of indices and to report to the Committee at its September meeting.

C. Draft declaration of principles for statistical activities in international organizations

4. The United Nations Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs provided an oral update on the status of the draft declaration of principles for statistical activities in international organizations. A first draft had been circulated to the drafting group in November 2003. Extensive comments had been received. The main discussion in the drafting group currently focused on the degree of detail to be included and on whether a two-tier approach (for users and for statisticians) should be taken. The Division will circulate a revised version to the drafting group. The objective is to present a text for final amendments and adoption at the September meeting of the Committee.

D. Strategic issues related to Millennium Development Goal indicators

5. The Division presented the Committee with an oral update on its work towards the preparation of the reports on the Millennium Development Goals in 2004 and 2005.[1] The Division also briefed the Committee on the Marrakech Action Plan for

improving development statistics. Some members of the Committee recalled that as a consequence of the Committee's discussion of the Tim Holt report[2] in September 2003, a number of strategic issues had been identified, such as the frequency of producing data, the corresponding development of data sources (surveys and administrative sources) and resource allocation between national and international reporting.[3] The Committee asked the Division to prepare a written report for its next session, listing those and other strategic issues related to Millennium Development Goal indicators, and identifying whether and to what extent the issues had been addressed either by the inter-agency and expert group on Millennium Development Goal indicators and/or by the Marrakech Action Plan. The objective of the report is to facilitate discussion by the Committee at its next session, which would critically assess how the work of the international organizations in supporting countries to produce data needed for the Millennium Development Goal indicators could be improved. In that context the Committee took note of the offer of the possibility that the World Bank might finance further work by Tim Holt and invited the Division and the World Bank to cooperate on the formulation of terms of reference. The Committee also agreed that it was important to stay informed on the activities of the Millennium Project, in particular with respect to their use of data.

E. Q2004 satellite conference on data quality

6. The Division briefed the Committee on the call for papers, which had been sent to Committee members, for the planned satellite conference on data quality for international organizations in Germany from 27 to 28 May. Some Committee members recalled that one of the objectives of the conference was to share existing practices. The Committee welcomed the intention of various organizations to contribute papers. The deadline for submission of brief outlines of proposed papers was set for 20 March 2004, with papers due by the end of April.

F. World Health Organization Friends of the Chair report to the Statistical Commission and its implications for the Committee

7. The representative of the World Health Organization (WHO) briefed the Committee on recent activities of WHO, including the establishment of the Health Metrics Network. WHO emphasized its commitment to cooperation with the Statistical Commission as well as with partner agencies through the Committee. The representative of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) stressed in particular the importance of cooperation at the regional level and highlighted the development of a health indicator framework for Latin America and the work on classifications. The Committee welcomed the progress made in improving cooperation at both the global and regional levels.

G. Other business

8. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development briefed the Committee on recent cooperative activities with various organizations, including the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the regional commissions, to

develop a core list of information and communication technology (ICT) indicators and to assist countries in improving their capacities to develop statistics related to information and communication technologies. The Committee accepted the UNCTAD proposal to add the issue to the agenda of its next meeting and welcomed the UNCTAD offer to prepare a paper.

9. The Committee took note of the discussion between OECD and the World Tourism Organization on appropriate mechanisms of cooperation in the area of tourism statistics. The Chair invited both organizations to present a joint note for discussion at the next meeting of the Committee, which should identify the issues of concern and contain proposals for effective cooperation and division of labour among the organizations involved.

10. The Committee took note of the current review by the Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat) of existing cooperation arrangements and of its invitation to other agencies to provide appropriate inputs, including suggestions for new areas of cooperation.

11. The Committee also took note of the new work programme of the statistics unit of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. In that regard, the Committee welcomed further involvement by statisticians from specialized agencies and organizations of the United Nations not currently active in the Committee.

12. The Committee noted the offer of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to hold a future Committee meeting in Montreal.

H. Agenda, dates and venue for the fourth meeting of the Committee in September 2004

13. The Committee decided to hold its fourth meeting in New York from 1-3 September 2004. It also agreed with the proposal to make the discussion of the draft declaration of principles for statistical activities in international organizations its main theme. In addition to the topics included in the preliminary agenda (SA/2004/2), the Committee agreed to include in its agenda "ICT indicators" (UNCTAD), "Tourism statistics" (World Tourism Organization, OECD), "Data/metadata presentation" (OECD), "Standards for statistical data and metadata exchange (SDMX)" (OECD), "Revision policies" (International Monetary Fund) and "Long time series" (OECD). The Committee also took note of the offer of PAHO and UNESCO to contribute to proposed agenda item 5, "Statistics at the subnational level". The Committee reiterated its request that authors should provide annotations for the various agenda items, so that a clear distinction could be made between agenda items that were for decision, such as the adoption of guidelines or best practices, agenda items that were for discussion and agenda items that primarily served the purpose of information exchange between agencies. The Committee asked the Secretariat to circulate a revised agenda for the fourth meeting of the Committee, to request annotations, and to follow up on preparations for the fourth session vigorously. The deadline for the submission of documents was set at mid-July.

Notes

[1] See also "Indicators for monitoring the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals" (E/CN.3/2004/23).

[2] Tim Holt, "Aggregation of national data to regional and global estimates" (SA/2003/8).

[3] See also "Report of the 2nd meeting of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities (Geneva, 8-10 September 2003)", (SA/2003/19), para. 9.

Part Two

Report of the fourth meeting of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities (New York, 1-3 September 2004)

I. Introduction

1. The Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities held its fourth meeting in New York on 1-3 September 2004. The meeting was chaired by Andrew Flatt, Director of the Statistics Division of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

II. Work of the meeting

A. Adoption of the report of the third meeting and of the agenda of the fourth meeting

2. The Committee adopted the report of its third meeting of 1 March 2004 in New York. It also adopted the agenda for the fourth meeting.

B. Draft declaration of principles for statistical activities in international organizations

3. The Committee commended the work of the drafting group under the leadership of Willem de Vries (United Nations Statistics Division). The Committee made several specific editorial suggestions and requested the drafting group to take them into account when preparing a revised version. The Committee agreed that it was useful to make a clear distinction between the principles and practices; the principles should govern all statistical activities of international organizations.

4. The members of the Committee agreed with the proposal to seek endorsement of the declaration of principles from the Statistical Commission, preferably at the March 2005 session. The drafting group was, therefore, encouraged to present a revised draft within the next two weeks and circulate it to committee members for a final round of comments by the end of October. Based on the comments received, the drafting group was asked to prepare a final version by November. Provided that there was sufficient consensus among the members of the Committee, the text would be submitted as an official document to the Statistical Commission. The Committee also noted that, owing to legal and institutional complexities, it might be very difficult for some organizations to give the principles formal institutional support, even though the principles might be supported at the professional statistical level in the organizations. It was hoped that ultimately member countries would recognize the declaration of principles as a tool to demand accountability from international organizations and would, therefore, strongly encourage international organizations to implement the principles. In that context it was also mentioned that it might be helpful if the Committee submitted the text to the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB).

C. Follow-up to the Q2004 satellite conference on data quality

5. The Committee members expressed satisfaction at the successful Conference on data quality for international organizations. It was the first substantive event held by the Committee, and was organized immediately following the European Conference on Quality and Methodology in Official Statistics (Q2004) in Germany in May 2004. It was suggested that the Committee should use similar future occasions for further substantive debate.

6. The Committee members agreed that further work on quality management in international organizations and on related governance issues of the international statistical system was needed. In that context it welcomed the document prepared by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development as an excellent basis for further discussion. The Committee set up a working group (consisting of the OECD as the convener, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the Economic Commission for Europe, UNESCO, Eurostat, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Statistics Division) to develop a paper defining the issues as well as the next steps, to be presented to the Committee at its meeting in March 2005. It was also decided to use the introductory note to the declaration of principles to keep the Statistical Commission informed of the ongoing work of the Committee.

D. Strategic issues related to Millennium Development Goal indicators

7. The Committee raised several issues on which it felt further clarification was needed from the Statistics Division and the inter-agency expert group on Millennium Development Goal indicators. Those were the rationale and technical appropriateness of annual reporting; the means of ensuring greater use and visibility of agency inputs to the international reporting process; and the objectives of the inter-agency group's subgroups, particularly their role in recommending changes in the list of Millennium Development Goal indicators and their specifications. The Committee agreed that the Division should include this information in a report to the Committee on Millennium Development Goal indicators at its next session, following further consultations with the inter-agency expert group.

8. The Committee strongly agreed that documentation and accountability were critical to the credibility of Millennium Development Goal indicators compiled through the inter-agency expert group for international reporting. It recognized the considerable value of the technical study and suggestions prepared by Tim Holt as consultant to the International Labour Organization as a framework for compiling information on and eventually for improving international practices in preparing regional estimates for international use. However, it expressed concern about the magnitude of work that would be required of agencies to complete the questionnaire on estimates and aggregates, and of the work that would be required to prepare a final report and recommendations. In that connection it noted the considerable burdens on agencies in the inter-agency expert group to meet the requirements set by the General Assembly for reporting in 2005 for a five-year follow-up to the Millennium Summit. It agreed that the agencies responsible for compilation of Millennium Development Goal indicators should be invited to comment on the current draft of the questionnaire in relation to methodological practices being implemented by the agencies. The Committee noted that the agencies need to be

transparent in their methodological practices and be prepared to address queries from countries on Millennium Development Goal indicators.

9. The Committee made the observation that the Millennium Development Goal project had brought inter-agency coordination to a high level. The project had also raised agencies awareness of data problems and methodological practices. The Committee asked the United Nations Statistics Division to prepare a paper in 2006 on lessons learned on inter-agency coordination and quality assurance practices.

10. The Committee also received a briefing on DevInfo software, a United Nations tool to monitor progress towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. In that regard, it asked the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) to write and widely disseminate a newsletter to inform United Nations country teams of the latest developments and of the introduction of the DevInfo software. In addition, it was recommended that a joint guidance note be prepared outlining the complementarity between DevInfo and other existing tools, such as the World Bank's Live Database (LDB), and describing their comparative advantages.

E. Statistics at the subnational level

11. The Committee welcomed the report of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) on its work to develop statistics at the subnational level. It also took note of information provided by the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs on its ongoing work on the publication *World Urbanization Prospects*. The Committee agreed that, despite the primary mandate of statistical units in international organizations to produce data at the national level, it would be desirable to keep the issue of statistics at the subnational level under review. It also noted that more training would be required for countries to strengthen their production of subnational data.

F. Information and communication technology indicators

12. The Committee was briefed on the Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development as the coordination mechanism put in place by agencies and regional commissions in the area of ICT measurement and took note of the major activities planned, including regional meetings, preparation of training courses, an ICT measurement guidebook and a common ICT statistics database. Committee members observed that the location of the planned database should be considered carefully in the light of the different dissemination policies of international agencies and that SDMX standards should be used for such a database. Furthermore, the International Labour Organization invited the Partnership to contribute to the ongoing work on the classification of occupational groups in order to better identify the ICT sector. The Division agreed to participate in the Partnership. The Committee noted that the Partnership would prepare an updated report for the 2005 session of the Statistical Commission.

G. Tourism statistics

13. The Committee welcomed the Division's proposal to form an inter-agency coordination group on tourism statistics and encouraged all concerned stakeholders to participate in the first meeting, immediately following the fourth meeting of the Committee. It invited the group to define the scope of its work and its working mechanisms and to report back to the March 2005 meeting of the Committee.

H. Presentation of data and metadata

14. The Committee expressed its appreciation for the extensive work done by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development on the preparation of the draft data and metadata reporting and presentation handbook and encouraged OECD to go ahead with the publication of the handbook as soon as possible. It acknowledged the invitation to all agencies to provide a last round of comments at the present stage, and several Committee members committed to do so. It was observed that the handbook would not only reflect a commitment by international organizations, but would also constitute a useful reference source for developing countries. In that context it was suggested that, at that moment, feedback on the draft from non-OECD countries should be actively sought. The importance of dissemination in several languages was also stressed. In order to allow for further development of the handbook in the future, it was suggested to use a dynamic format for publication (e.g. on the World Wide Web), which would allow the handbook to reflect more extensively presentation practices in the non-economic statistical areas. Committee members also noted the significance of the manual in the context of the work on standards for statistical data and metadata exchange in particular and in making effective arrangements for the sharing of data among international agencies in general.

I. Harmonization of the base year for index numbers

15. The Committee took note of the UNCTAD report on the implementation of the Committee's recommendation for international organizations to rebase by the end of 2005 their index numbers, using 2000 as base year.

J. Health statistics

16. The Committee welcomed the report by the World Health Organization on its efforts to implement the recommendations by the Statistical Commission. It took note of the announcement that WHO and the United Nations Statistics Division would work together to identify the issues on health statistics that required attention. The effort will include an assessment of existing coordination mechanisms and an exploration of the way in which an intersecretariat working group on health statistics could be most effective and efficient. WHO and the Division will keep relevant stakeholders fully informed and involved. Some members pointed out the urgent need for action in the area to have sufficient time to respond to the mandate given by the Statistical Commission. The view was expressed that the World Health

Organization, as the international agency with sector responsibilities in this field, would be expected to take the lead role.

K. Revision policies

17. The Committee took note of the announcement by the International Monetary Fund that their work on revision policies had been completed and that the paper entitled "Revisions policy for official statistics: a matter of governance"[1] had been published on the IMF web site. A link to the Committee's web site will be made available.

L. Household survey network

18. The Committee welcomed the announcement by the World Bank, UNICEF and WHO to launch jointly on 27 September 2004 an international household survey network, whose aim would be to facilitate further coordination among international agencies involved in conducting household surveys. Committee members observed that in order to strengthen national statistical systems, censuses, surveys and administrative records needed to be developed jointly, and encouraged the network to maintain the link with ongoing international work to develop all data sources. Several Committee members emphasized the usefulness of developing "model modules" to address specific statistical areas. Some Committee members asked for a better formulation of one of the proposed activities, the development of a minimum household survey programme, insisting that it should in no case consist of a prescriptive programme imposed by international agencies. Committee members expressed their support for two other proposed activities, the development of a survey data dissemination tool kit and the maintenance of a joint survey metadata repository. The conveners of the network offered to keep the Committee informed on the progress of the network.

M. Standards on data and metadata exchange

19. The Committee took note of the progress report on the SDMX initiative presented by OECD, in particular the announcement of the posting of version 1.0 of the proposed SDMX standards on the web for comments and the continued work on the pilot project on external debt statistics.

N. Issues related to the work of the task forces and intersecretariat working groups

20. The International Monetary Fund, as the convener of the Intersecretariat Working Group on Price Statistics, announced the completion and printing of *Consumer Price Index Manual: Theory and Practice* and its availability in CD-ROM format and on the International Labour Organization web site. Furthermore, the IMF announced the completion of *Producer Price Indices Manual: Theory and Practice* as well as planned future work on a manual on international trade price indices. In its capacity as the convener of the Task Force on Finance Statistics, the IMF also announced that a central database on external debt, to be

located at the World Bank, will be launched in October/November. The World Trade Organization, as the convener of the International Merchandise Trade Statistics Task Force, informed Committee members that the revision process of the SITC had been initiated. OECD, as the chair of the Intersecretariat Working Group on National Accounts, reported to the Committee that the substantive work on the updating of the 1993 System of National Accounts was progressing around 44 specific issues that had been identified and that a project manager as well as an editor would be announced shortly. The United Nations Statistics Division, as the convener of the Inter-agency Working Group on Environment Statistics, announced that the group had been formed with the objective of coordinating data collection and that the initial focus would be on water statistics. Finally, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, as the chair of the Task Force on Statistics of International Trade in Services, informed the Committee that, after the publication of the handbook on trade in services, the group's focus was shifting towards monitoring country progress in data reporting and towards further work of the technical subgroups, such as the one on movements of foreign workers.

O. Major new initiatives planned by organizations

21. Committee members briefed each other on their respective major new initiatives, including the organization of special events, the launch of publications and/or other programme activities.

P. Other matters relating to the Statistical Commission

22. The Committee was briefed by the Division on the current discussion among member States on improving the working methods of the Statistical Commission.

Q. Other business

23. The Committee briefly discussed its web site. It agreed to continue to have password-protected access to documents relating to its regular working sessions. However, it also agreed with the proposal of the Secretariat to further develop a publicly accessible segment of the web site and to post more information, such as links to the web sites of Committee members.

24. With respect to the agenda of its next meeting on Monday, 28 February 2005, the Committee adopted the following list of issues: declaration of principles (United Nations Statistics Division), quality standards (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development), tourism (World Tourism Organization), surveys (World Bank), Millennium Development Goal indicators (United Nations Statistics Division), information sharing on statistical capacity projects (Partnership in Statistics for Development in the Twenty-first Century (PARIS 21)), statistical software (United Nations Statistics Division). Regarding its fall meeting, the Committee gratefully accepted the offer of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to host it from 6-8 September 2005 in Rome.

25. The Committee elected Sylvester Young, Director of the Bureau of Statistics, ILO, as its new chairman for the biennium 2004-2006. It expressed its gratitude to the outgoing chairman, Andrew Flatt of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, for his effective leadership during the transition period from the former subcommittee of the Administrative Committee on Coordination to the new Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities.

Notes

[1] **Carol S. Carson, Sarmad Khawaja and Thomas K. Morrison, "Revisions policy for official statistics: a matter of governance", IMF Working Paper No. WP/04/87 (Washington, D.C., 2004).**